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through transgressive participation: Taipei's
'Parks for Children by Children' movement**

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Reinventing invited spaces of citizenship through transgressive participation: Taipei's 'Parks for Children by Children' movement

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Introduction

This paper seeks to address the question of how to employ an insurgent planner, or how to incorporate insurgent planning tactics and insurgent actors into mainstream planning practices. Even without specific knowledge of what 'insurgent planning' means, this question undoubtedly appears counterintuitive. Being 'insurgent' implies an inherent and direct hostility towards an established authority, traditionally the state. However, in a post-neoliberal globalized context, insurgent planning might be more accurately positioned in opposition to what we might call 'the planning regime'. This can be defined as the entire constellation of public and private actors and institutions (including laws and norms) across local, national and international scales that are complicit in the professional, technical, legal or generally institutionalizing processes of defining what counts as 'planning'. Yet even within this expanded field of actors, the idea of employing an 'insurgent' remains difficult to envision. However, a closer reading of insurgent planning theory makes the idea of employing an insurgent planner less paradoxical than it initially seems.

We define insurgent planning with Miraftab (2009, 2016). Miraftab argues that to be considered as 'insurgent' instances of planning requires adherence to three guiding principles: transgression, counter-hegemony and imagination. Insurgent planning is represented by practices that are counter-hegemonic in that 'they destabilize the normalized order of things'; they 'transgress time and place by locating historical memory and transnational consciousness at the heart of their practices'; and they are imaginative in promoting the concept of a different world as being [as] both possible and necessary' (Miraftab, 2016: 481). Such practices embody these principles in how they rethink and reframe 'participation', in particular by 'not constrain[ing] themselves to the spaces for citizen participation sanctioned by the authorities (invited spaces)'. Instead, 'they invent

new spaces or re-appropriate old ones where they can invoke their citizenship rights to further their counter-hegemonic interests'. Yet these spaces do not exist (only) in polar opposition to one another. Instead, 'fluidity characterizes insurgent citizenship practices: through the entanglement of inclusion and resistance they move across the invited and the invented spaces of citizenship' (Miraftab, 2016: 483).

Despite being founded on this ideal of fluidity, many (or most) critical approaches to participation framed in terms of 'insurgency' argue the neoliberalization of urban development has turned civil engagement in planning processes into a post-political endeavor, or a closure of democratic opportunities that marks the 'demise of dissent', and thus depict any form of institutional participation as inimical to insurgent planning (Hilbrandt, 2017: 2). In some formulations of insurgent planning, in other words, what it means to 'transgress' has paradoxically fallen victim to a sort of generalizing consensus that seems to exclude the potential for transformative politics within invited spaces of participation. To transgress, in the sense we understand it, means to not only pursue 'planning' outside legal, institutionalized forms, but also outside of what appears to be an increasingly narrow set of actors and actions being considered as 'insurgent'.

This paper, therefore, seeks to contribute to debates over what constitutes 'participation', the spaces/sites wherein such acts take place, how civil society is engaged in such process-spaces and, ultimately, the extent to which these embody principles of counter-hegemony, imagination and, most importantly, transgression. We explore these questions through the experience of a group of citizens in Taipei, Taiwan (a group named 'Parks for Children by Children', or PFC) that, through a variety of formal and informal opportunities, sought to alter urban space and urban governance to be more inclusive, in particular for children (a group frequently excluded from what counts as 'planning'). The PFC engaged with government actors at various levels and in a variety of capacities to try and alter the legal framework controlling public space, public opinion surrounding the use of public space spaces, and how public space is physically accessed to be more inviting to children and the act of play. They pursued these goals through two broad strategies: expanding and improving dedicated play spaces for children in the city so that children everywhere had equal opportunities to learn and grow physically and socially; and to remake spaces not conventionally suited for children to play in (Taipei's city streets) into safer, more welcoming spaces for this.

Tracing the story of the PFC through these endeavors, we demonstrate how citizens in Taipei express both insurgent characteristics and a willingness to follow the rules and play the game, so to speak, when engaging state authorities in attempts to expand the right to the city for

marginalized groups. The PFC employed imaginative tactics that challenged the normalized order of things but also used traditional channels for inclusion. They protested dominant practices they felt were unjust and also sometimes backed down and compromised. In other words, the case of the PFC shows us how hard it is to define sites and processes of distinctly 'insurgent' or 'de-politicized' forms of participation.

Transgressing insurgence: A short review

Insurgent planning is a theory that was initially proposed as an alternative to modernism, and later to neoliberalism, with critiques of communicative/collaborative planning processes based on a Habermasian understanding of communicative rationality acting as a sort of bridge between the two.

Holston (1995) initially coined the term 'insurgent citizenship' as a rejection of modernism. Modernism is an ideology associated with an unwavering belief in scientific and technical progress and the central role of the state in propelling these forward – particularly through 'master plans' that simplified nature, society and space into more 'legible' elements (or easier to measure, map and ultimately manipulate figures and groups) (Scott, 1998). Because of this, the modernist version of citizenship is always conditioned by state-building insofar as the state, in its efforts to make society more legible and controllable, universalizes citizenship as formal citizenship, or being a member of a national political community. This singular form of state citizenship seeks to do away with the messier messy reality of plural cultural identities and the conflicts and inequalities surrounding their differentiation (Holston, 1995). Thus, in addition to planning and constructing massive industrialized economic systems that included huge planned agricultural spaces and grid-patterned cities full of expertly design factories, this ideology also entailed a kind of social engineering, or the invention of modern society and the modern citizen.

Countering this vision of citizenship, Holston noted that 'citizenship changes as new members emerge to advance their claims, expanding its realm, and as new forms of segregation and violence counter these advances, eroding it', and argued that 'sites of insurgent citizenship are found at the intersection of these processes of expansion and erosion' (1995: 44). In cities, he argues, these 'sites of insurgence' are those that 'introduce into the city new identities and practices which disturb established histories' (which, he emphasizes, may be of any social group or class) and argues for an insurgent kind of planning that looks for exactly these sites of emergent citizenship and/or its repression – the 'fault lines' of processes that engage with the problematic nature of belonging to society (ibid: 46).

Leonie Sandercock (1998) transformed this argument for insurgent citizenship into a call for developing an ‘insurgent planning’ theory through what she called ‘insurgent historiographies’. Planning and planners, Sandercock noted, were historiographic imaginaries defined by myths of their success. Other aspects of city making, including the actors, identities and forms of knowledge behind them, were systematically excluded not (just) in what Holston (1995) called the ‘ethnographic present’ (i.e. acts of exclusion in everyday life), but also from inclusion in the future of ‘planning’ by being left out of its historic past.

Modernist, mainstream planning historians have seen their subject as the profession and their object as describing and celebrating its emergence and achievements. This approach has at least two significant limitations. If the subject of planning is the profession, then only those who qualify as "professionals" are seen as relevant historical agents. The result is a narrative about the ideas and actions of white middle-class men, since women and people of color were, at least until recently, systematically excluded from the profession, through their exclusion from the institutions of higher education. And if the object of planning history is the emergence of the profession and its achievements, then there is the privileging of a heroic story (Planning as Progress) at the expense of any kind of critical insight into or scrutiny of the actual practices of planning, including its knowledge bases (Sandercock, 1998: 7)

As the nationalistic high modernist ideology gave way to globalist neoliberal variant (still based on the certainty scientific and technical progress, but with global markets supplanting nation states as the central guiding force), studies of insurgent citizenship and insurgent planning began to coalesce around critical explorations focused on two areas of knowledge exclusion – although not necessarily in exclusion from one another. The first group of studies focus on the processes of exclusion entailed in places of the Global South grappling with histories of (Western) colonialism (cf. Holston, 2009; Miraftab, 2009). These were examinations of insurgency in conversation with of a broader push for shifting the geographic and cultural centers of theory production away from the Global North in order to see cities (and the meanings of urban planning and development) from a Southern perspective (cf. Robinson, 2002; Roy, 2005, 2009; Watson, 2009). These were studies that saw post-colonial struggles as an opportunity to turn the table on the power dynamics of global knowledge sharing (wherein ‘underdeveloped’ nations could learn from the successes of their ‘developed’ counterparts) while also (returning to Holston’s original claims) challenging the assumption that ‘progress and ‘modernization’ are synonymous and that post-colonial citizenship in a newly formed nation state is synonymous with political inclusivity (Miraftab, 2009).

A second, often overlapping issue related to the rise of neoliberalism comes in challenges to the assent of Habermas' (1984) theories of communicative rationality and communicative action, and the consensus-based politics these entail. Habermas' ideas were incorporated into theories of communicative and collaborative planning (cf. Healey, 1997; Innes and Booher, 1999) that became hegemonic in international planning (Purcell, 2009). From very early on, however, critics challenged the emancipatory, empowering promise of the participatory principles these theories (and those derived from them) promote (cf. Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000). And while many criticisms have been leveled at these theories, the question critics raise tends to focus on what Souza (2006) termed 'structural cooptation'.

This is defined as the combined effect of multiple different forms of manipulation, but in particular those forms representing subtle exertions of hegemonic power, typically exercised by state machinery on civil society. Essentially, the argument goes that by controlling the contours of participatory mechanisms from the outset (the who, what, when, where, why and how of participation), the state begins with, and maintains, its position of authority throughout the ensuing processes. It is thus able to legitimize and perpetuate its power and influence by creating a perception of inclusion rather than incorporating challenges to this – a Gramscian reading of hegemonic politics (Miraftab, 2016). Souza describes the effect of this as 'a gradual adjustment' of the agendas and dynamics of social movements to fall in line with the agenda and dynamics of the state and politicians, and notes the potential for such an adjustment to diminish (or even kill) the 'critical sense and energy' that social movements carry (2006: 334) – leading Cooke and Kothari (2001) to claim that forms of participation based on communicative, collaborative principles are forms of 'tyranny'.

Many have already explored the multiple mechanisms behind this gradual adjustment, so a deep discussion on this is not warranted here. Instead, we rely on Purcell's (2009) summary of the arguments against communicative/collaborative forms of participatory planning.

First and foremost, critics note that trying to reach consensus is, from the outset, a form of anti-politics, or post-politics: an attempt to curb dissent and disagreement rather than empower those with dissenting opinions to that of the mainstream. Second, critics were quick to note there is always the practical issue that only a few members of 'the public' are ever represented in official participatory planning sessions, and these are typically only representatives of disproportionately affected members of society. Both of these contribute to a third problem, which is that in participatory planning processes that seek to reach consensus, there will always be an inequality in epistemological authority, or the ability to make others agree with or acknowledge one's arguments.

Cultural values are not equally distributed in society, and if people are not esteemed equally, their arguments will never be given equal footing. Combined, Purcell (2009) argues, these pitfalls make participatory mechanisms based on communicative planning principles more likely to reproduce the status quo than challenge it.

However, despite the value that these critiques clearly have in reminding us to be wary of participatory offerings that are, or can be, cooptive and de-politicizing (cf. Roy, 2015), we should also be wary of accepting that all forms of formal participation are necessarily antipolitical. As Miraftab (2016) argued, ‘insurgent planning is not an exclusive subjectivity, just as planning practices in general are not confined to professionally trained planners. Indeed, planning is a contested field of interacting activities by multiple actors’, which means that debunking the ‘myth’ of the planner involves also debunking totalizing theories that see fields of contestation and spheres of action as strictly isolated from one another (2016: 489).

Recognizing this, we join a smaller group of insurgent planning theorists who aim to refocus theoretical gaze onto the sites of entanglement between invited and invented spaces of citizenship and forms of participation, or what Holston called the ‘fissures’ between a universalized and pluralized understanding of citizenship and inclusion. Putri (2019), for one, argues that insurgent planning scholars should pay greater attention to processes of ‘co-production’, turning away from binary concepts that and towards ‘grey spaces’ that combine binary oppositions (like ‘state’ and ‘society’, as Putri notes, but also the ‘invited’ and ‘invented’ spaces of citizenship these entail). Earle (2012), alternatively, argues that not all cases of insurgency follow strictly informal pathways. Earle’s work in Brazil shows how text-based constitutional law were just as important (if not more so) to many marginalized actors as informal and illegal forms of claiming rights, like with those ‘earning’ their citizenship through practices such as auto-construction. The use of formal, legal types of inclusion is also seen as providing opportunities for insurgent transformation by Hilbrandt, who argues formal spaces of participation in urban planning processes (i.e. ‘invited’ spaces) provide opportunities to defy urban planning by ‘fostering moments of conflict’ (2017: 538). Cahen, Schneider and Saegert, in a similar argument, ‘resist the notion that incorporation into formal frameworks forecloses future counter-hegemonic inventions’, and note that formal participatory opportunities can often meet the immediate material needs of marginalized actors that ensure they can continue to struggle in perhaps more imaginative, transgressive ways the future (2019: 4).

Building on the critiques raised by these authors and their arguments, we argue for an understanding of participation that is truly transgressive – which is to say ‘fluid’ – or which does

not adhere to totalizing definitions, but rather constantly aims to disrupt such attempts. Below, we describe the evolution of the PFC in Taipei, Taiwan, followed by a brief discussion of this history that seeks to show how this group's attempts to change the city to be more inclusive exemplify just such a transgressive form of planning and participation.

Establishing the play street initiative in Taipei

The fieldwork of study PFC and how they practice their advocacy work is composed of 7 in-depth interviews with core members of PFC and other stakeholders in policy and political institutions. In addition, the PFC opened the access for researchers to join their private online working group space. For making further analysis of their work discussion and trace the history of their work.

From 'angry moms' to trusted planning partners

In 2015, a group of full-time mothers and their children gathered to protest the removal of Pebble-Washed-in-Concrete (PWC) playground equipment in a small, unassuming Taipei City park. The city was intent on replacing this rather unique equipment with the same prefabricated plastic module equipment it was putting in parks everywhere. This homogenization of parks with standardized plastic equipment, according to the city, was meant to make these play spaces safer for younger children.

As playground regulars, these mothers had observed this process firsthand over and over, and claimed it was exacerbating a preexisting lack of decent spaces for their children to play. To them, the discourse of safety and risk aversion behind these 'upgrades' was actually leading to a decline in the number and quality of play spaces in the city. Not only were there simply not enough playgrounds in Taipei, the playgrounds that did exist, they felt, were not being designed and built to encourage the kind of creative and adventurous play that supported the good mental and physical development they sought for their children.

The latter problem, , was due in part to a lack of good *participatory* spaces. They felt decisions were being made long before playground renovations began, and while new designs were technically granted citizen approval in public meetings organized to inform and consult local residents about upcoming projects, developers and designers had no obligation to incorporate opinions expressed in these meetings in their plans. Further, when opportunities did arise for participation, these mothers felt they were seen as 'angry moms' coming to make trouble for the (mostly) male public officials and planning professionals. They were not treated as true 'partners' in a collective design

and planning process. This is not out of the ordinary as planning in Taiwan has historically been a male-dominated system (Shih, 2016).

Reacting to these issues, some of the ‘angry moms’ formed a Facebook fan page called ‘Parks and Playground For Children by Children’ (PFC) to try and develop a local movement in the vein of Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which establishes the importance of children’s right to play and the need to build play-friendly cities. Simultaneously, a more participatory oriented Facebook group was set up under the same name, for other parents and citizens to report playgrounds issues or share good examples. Through this platform, they shared case studies about participatory playground design, called on citizens to join protests, public meetings and design workshops, and conducted a survey to map the distribution of playgrounds across the Taipei metropolitan area. In 5 years, the PFC grew from a single protest event to an influential public group promoting children's rights with more than 50,000 followers on social media platforms in Taiwan. This growth gave the PFC a more powerful voice, and earned them a place at the table – becoming regular, active participants in dozens of playground planning projects across Taipei.

The type of participation this entails, however, has varied. At the less participatory end of the spectrum, the PFC has been invited to offer opinions or observations to municipal entities and/or design firms through written feedback and via private work meetings. In cases of stronger participation, adversely, they have used their social media reach to organize and host their own autonomous participatory workshops, and conduct participatory design workshops that allow children to give input. This typically involves non-traditional forms of ‘participation’ like including in design processes by observing how they choose to play in different environments and engage with different objects. Following the completion of a playground renovation project, the PFC might also invite children to come test newly built playgrounds and collect feedback. Step by step, these efforts have altered perceptions of the group as ‘angry mothers’, establishing instead an identity of trustworthy civic partners, and have ultimately helped push public officials to focus public space policy and design on a ‘children-centered’ (rather than risk-averse) agenda (Lee, 2019). The group has since leveraged this success to try and expand this ‘children-centered’ agenda into other public spaces and political arenas.

In the next part, we explore how this complicated process unfolded and the different formal and informal strategies and pathways the PFC took along the way.

Expanding children’s right to the city: from playgrounds to play streets

Over three years of public engagement, the PFC saw that conservative playground design did not stem only from conservative public officials and their public space policies. From participating in public meetings, they began to sense a more widespread cultural issue of undervaluing play as an essential part of everyday life. Thus, following early success with playground reforms, the group turned their attention to enacting broader change by transforming Taipei into a more playful urban environment in general. This became the basis of a new ‘play street’ movement that launched in mid-2018. By shifting from playground upgrades to expanding options for where “play” in unconventional sites, the PFC sought to not only alter urban space to be more child friendly, but to also change the mindset and culture of Taipei residents and planning decision makers to see the value and purpose of public space differently.

The group outlined three broad right-to-access-related issues in relation to this goal. First, the group noted problems with the structural makeup of participatory design meetings. Most notably, they saw that participation rates for individuals with a vested interest in improving and expanding sites of play (namely parents and children) were remarkably low. They argued that notice about public meetings was often too short for those not already involved in participatory governance processes, and noted that meetings often took place during office hours. This effectively excluded young working parents and school-aged children from participating. Consequently, participants were not representative of the primary users or target audience of play spaces, but rather consisted mostly of retired seniors already actively involved in the community. The PFC felt these predominantly elderly participants tended to take more conservative, risk-averse approaches to designing play environments, which only strengthened the conservative approach preferred by the city as this effectively constituted the only citizen input into planning and design. The PFC saw launching street play events as an alternative and improved means for generating collective support and involvement – a more inclusive, cross-generational sampling targeted directly at key demographics with the greatest need for the spaces in question.

Second, parks and playgrounds are not equally distributed in the city of Taipei. Within densely populated, older areas of the city, it is almost impossible to expand the stock of play space without large-scale urban renewal. Street play, the PFC felt, could be particularly useful for places where there is a lack of dedicated play space and therefore instrumental in improving the equality of access to play for all children in the city.



Figure 1. Children enjoyed play with water on the street (photo credit: PFC)

Finally, and building on both of these two goals, this, the goals of the PFC resonated with a much broader call to enhance the right to the city for all by changing the nature of (and people's relationship to) 'the street'. The street, the PFC argued, was defined (as both a concept and an experiential place) by a narrow range of activities and actors. They felt making the street more open to play could help expand equality in general by increasing its use value for a large subsection of the population that was increasingly being excluded from it. As the former chief secretary of PFC argued:

“The whole point is to return the street space to children. Why is it important? Because in an adults' world, streets never disappear from everyday life: we use streets everyday. We bike, jog, drive, run marathons, hold weddings and funerals, protests on the street, etc. But why are our children so far away from the street? Although the street is a type of public space planned by urban planners, no one ever thought the street should also be for kids to use. The street play movement is also about raising street equality.”

This goal of expanding children's right to the street acts as a framework that effectively combines the participatory access dimensions of the group's first main issue with the spatially-related access problems articulated by their second. When thinking of street access, Whitzman et al. (2010) remind us that both the journey *and* the destination matter. This statement works on both literal and metaphorical levels. First, this observation notes that modern cities and their streets have long been designed for the efficient movement of people and goods, with plans giving preference to

enhancing the experience of mobility over that of staying put. Second, the planning processes that produce these mobility-enhanced urban spaces are themselves ‘journeys’ of constructing ‘the city’. The PFC argued that planning in Taipei excluded children and the importance of play in both the literal and metaphorical sense of the street as a journey and a destination. Based on this understanding, the PFC decided to push the boundary of play (literally and metaphorically) in Taipei. However, in order to achieve a greater right of access to ‘the street’ for children, the PFC found they first needed to alter access to how streets are controlled by laws and policies in Taipei.

Taking it to/out of ‘the streets’: Institutional struggles, political alliances and public space order

At the very beginning of the play street movement, the PFC was encouraged by a public official who worked at the Taipei Urban Regeneration Office (URO) to seek support for their new initiative by enrolling in a community planning crowdfunding campaign. The campaign was funded by the URO and managed by the National Association for the Promotion of Community Universities (NAPCU) – a non-profit responsible for advocating continued education centers across Taiwan. The purpose of this campaign was to offer select citizen groups and their projects entrepreneurial mentorship, aiming to generate successful crowdfunding projects instead of relying on governmental support. The PFC won with a proposal to organize one small-scale, semi-public play street event in an area with limited access to playgrounds.

The process went smoothly at first. Using crowdfunding, the PFC managed to collect 1,760,000 New Taiwan Dollars (approximately 53,000 euros) from 850 co-creators, which it ultimately earmarked for three play street events. The team soon started to seek suitable locations, and, as posts from their Facebook working group indicate, many neighborhood leaders were very supportive and willing to co-host events. However, when the PFC officially applied for permission from the local police office to host the activity (a step they knew was necessary, but assumed was just a formality because streets could be closed for other community events), they were told that Article 133 of Traffic Safety Regulation made it explicitly illegal for pedestrians to play, run, sit and/or lie down on the street in any way that obstructs traffic. Because this was the law, and regardless of how they felt about it, the police could not issue them a permit for the PFC to close the street.

The group quickly realized they would need support within the government to make their play street movement come to life. In January 2019, a city councilor they approached helped organize a meeting with the District Office¹, District Police and the Taipei Department of Transportation.

¹ Taipei is divided into 12 administrative districts that have some rule making authorities

The conclusion was the event could not possibly be held under the current law and that, if they wanted to see their event happen, the law needed to be changed.

The PFC subsequently sought a meeting with the staff secretary of the mayor, who they knew had championed issues related to children during the mayor's election campaign. The secretary stated clearly that the city government could only help if there were a public institution willing to act as the 'competent authority' co-organizing the event with the PFC. On top of that, the events would still have to be fully legal and fully open to the public and free of charge. In addition to not having an organization in the government to act as a 'competent authority', this second point through another unexpected wrench in the PFC's plan.

In their original proposal (the one crowdfunding had backed), crowdfunding donations were considered tickets to the event, meaning only those who had paid would be allowed to participate. This was because in their marketing, crowdfunding participants were framed as 'co-creators', or more than just financiers. The PFC saw such an approach as essential for multiple reasons. First, in the risk assessment phase of the URO/NAPCU-assisted planning process, the PFC was required to have a confirmed number of event participants. This mechanism was used, then, to ensure people would show up at the event (since they had already paid for it), or at least appear so on paper. Beyond this, however, this was also seen by the PFC as an invitation for citizens to exercise agency vis-à-vis the event in multiple ways: by providing financial support, but also, by participating in the event itself, being co-creators in the sense of actually making the play street space come to life in the moment. Thus, as the PFC explained in the crowdfunding strategy, donations were considered as 'tickets' to a co-creation opportunity. This was not seen as 'open to the public' by the city government, and the PFC received what essentially constituted a second rejection by the government (the first being the police refusing to grant them a permit). Following this, they decided to turn away from a bureaucratic approach, and towards a more political one.

They approached two young, recently elected city councilors from the newly formed 'New Power Party' (NPP), which self-identifies as a centre-left progressive party. At that time, Taipei's recently re-elected mayor was facing increased political challenges, as he had lost the majority in city council and was seeking to establish a new political alliance. The NPP was one of his targets. At the same time, these newly elected, young city councilors (both female in their 30s) were searching for policy issues they could focus on to appease a generally young, progressive base². These factors combined to create a political window of opportunity for PFC, and, working together with the

² Both councilors announced to leave the 'New Power Party' at August, 2020

policy research teams of these city councilors, they were able to explore the different municipal department's annual key performance indicators (KPI) to identify KPIs relevant to play street goals and subsequently target these departments to act as a 'competent authority' to support their play street event.

From these efforts, the PFC initially identified multiple departments as potential allies, including the Department of Education, Department of Social Welfare, Department of Urban Development, Department of Transportation, Department of Cultural Affairs and the Department of Sports. Ultimately, however, they decided to focus their energy on the Department of Sports because the department's new director was strongly promoting innovative play initiatives as an effective way to enhance the mental and physical health and development of children. According to an interview with a PFC member, 'the head of the department was seen as an open-minded person who might be more open to new things' (interviewee b). Furthermore, the department's experience organizing the massive Taipei Marathon, with tens of thousands of runners, meant they already had extensive experience coordinating street activities (interviewee c). However, rather than the PFC approaching the Department directly, they opted to have the city councilors' teams act as mediators. The head of the Department of Sports took personal interest almost immediately, as he recounted in an interview.

“When the city councilor first proposed this to me, I did some research on what street play is. In the literature published by University of Bristol in 2017, it stated that children who join play street activities have a physical activity rate 3-5 times the average. This very much fit into our policy goal on increasing citizens' physical activity. In addition, the research also mentioned social interaction in play street events could improve children's social skills. Also, because parents and grandparents would accompany them, and would also mingle, the event could contribute to neighborhood safety and cohesion. Thus, I thought it was worth supporting.”

After unofficial communication between one city councilor and the department commissioner established the commissioner's personal interest, the mayor was again approached and an agreement was reached stating the Department of Sport would be the 'competent authority' needed for organizing play street events.



Figure 2. The press conference of the first play street event with politicians (photo credit: PFC)

This was a significant step for the PFC. The Department of Sport had the official and experiential capacity to organize and mobilize institutions and departments with control over city streets. Furthermore, they could guarantee the PFC could be present (and heard) at the initial inter-departmental coordination meeting. In the coordination meeting, representatives of different institutions informally brainstormed ways to alter the legal structure so as to allow for playing in the street. Ultimately, they decided that if the Department of Sport took responsibility, and if the event was considered an ‘experiment’, then play street events developed under this project would be conditionally allowed.

Not only did this coordination meeting offer the PFC greater insights into governance processes, but it saved them a substantial amount of time and effort compared to if they tried to organize the event on their own. In the meeting, representatives from different bureaus outlined all the conditions that PFC would need to meet in order to organize the event legally, and gave them strategies for how to meet these conditions. They didn’t have to go out and find this information by themselves, or learn by trial and error. For example, the Taipei City Parking Management and Development Office required that a specific number of days before the event, the PFC would need to post notifications on streets that would be closed in a very specific manner, and outlined precise procedures for how this was to be done. Lacking knowledge of details such as this could have derailed efforts down the line. The PFC could also ask questions directly and negotiate for things they needed (or wanted) from these departments in this meeting.



Figure 3. Blocking parking lot with specific tools for the events are all part of negotiation works before play can be realized on street (photo credit: PFC)

This meeting, therefore, is where real government/PFC coordination began, and the play street movement started to gain a legitimate foothold. However, while the PFC was authorized to organize the three play street events they had initially sought, the negotiations weren't yet complete. They still needed to select sites.

For the first of three events, the PFC had to settle for using the large civic square in front of Taipei City Hall – a compromise with the government that had both drawbacks and benefits. Its main downsides were that it wasn't, in fact, a street at all, and it was located in the middle of a largely commercial and institutional area, not a residential one with lots of families with children living immediately nearby. Yet the site did offer their event greater visibility. And for the second and third events, the PFC would be allowed to partner with the Department of Sport to actually close down streets. But these street locations were still less than ideal – again located in areas that weren't predominantly residential.

Despite obvious drawbacks, the PFC saw this as a clear win. The ultimate purpose of this negotiating and compromise-making was to establish a legal precedent for play street events in the future – to make it easier for other groups to access alternative play spaces. In this regard, in the institutional realm, the PFC was ultimately successful. A new policy was established that made play

street events an official category of legally-permitted street closure activities. Following their efforts, applicants can now simply request permission directly from the Department of Sport to hold play street events by filling out a form, which will be processed in basically the same way that the department reviews other events like marathons. In the end, while policy has a lot of room to grow, and will still likely face many hurdles, the play street concept now at least has the opportunity to be tested and tweaked as new play street events are organized around Taipei.

Discussion

In many ways, the PFC seems to exemplify the three main principles of insurgent planning: being counter-hegemonic, transgressive and imaginative.

To begin with, the group clearly sought to expand the definition of ‘planner’ and ‘planning’. Neither ‘angry moms’ nor children fit the standard definition of a planning partner in Taipei, a gap which the PFC was successfully able to overcome in numerous instances. *How* these actors were involved in the construction and design of play spaces was also transformative. Using child-led play experiments as tools for designing playground equipment is one example of how the group used imaginative forms of design and planning. Furthermore, their demands to create a wider variety of spaces for children to play were likewise attempts at upending established order of things in the city – this time in the physical realm of public space. This is doubly true for their attempt to change the street into a play space. Such spaces (new types of playgrounds and play street events) and processes (changing the established schedule, process and site of participation, as well as who is involved) all appear to be examples of counter-hegemonic, imaginative and transgressive planning practices. They sought to reinvent physical, cultural and social structures in their attempts to change the urban landscape and its accessibility/use value, as well as the laws and mindsets governing these, to be more inclusive.

Yet not all of what the PFC did can so easily be framed as ‘insurgent’. From the beginning of the play street movement, the group was clearly committed to working with the state and within its established laws. Despite multiple rejections and legal obstacles, there was a constant willingness to engage the city government cooperatively – the very thing that post-political critics of collaborative participatory mechanisms fear most as it implies the possibility that a political movement’s agenda has been, or could be, coopted by its hegemonic counterpart. Perhaps even more incompatible with the principles of insurgent planning was the exclusionary way that the group initially tried to design their play street events. Charging an entrance fee would have

privatized the play street in a way that directly contradicts the kind of inclusivity imagined in opening the street up for excluded, marginalized individuals and groups.

Yet rather than claiming these divergences make the PFC somehow *less* insurgent, we argue that these represent precisely the kind of transgressions that constitute the ‘grey area’ described by Putri (2019) as struggles that cross-cut methods, institutions, scales and spheres. The PFC represents a truly transgressive example of participatory planning precisely because it fails to be easily categorized.

To start, the case of the PFC challenges us to rethink how we define ‘participation’ by challenging us to define what constitutes group membership. As mentioned, the PFC began as a single protest event in a single Taipei City park. Yet through the brief history represented here, the group evolved into an online community with over 30,000 followers, and their play street crowdfunding drive drew in more than 800 donors. Yet while we don’t have specific numbers, the various instances of engaging with government officials in-person described by PFC interviewees suggest (as does common sense) that the number of individuals present at participatory design sessions and government meetings were far fewer than 800 or 30,000. So how do we draw lines around what constitutes membership in the PFC, and what, as members, constitutes participation? Clearly, online ‘members’ offered a practicable network for resource mobilization, as demonstrated by the large number of donors to the crowdfunding campaign. It is also entirely possible, if not likely, that having tens of thousands of followers online made the movement’s leaders/founders a more attractive partner for politicians like the young city councilors from the New Power Party (who in turn were attractive political allies for the mayor). But does this constitute ‘participation’? If so, where does this type of participation lie on the spectrum connecting ‘invited’ and ‘invented’ forms of citizenship. If not, then why and by whose decision?

Even if we focus our definition of the group on the small core of actors that did most of the PFC’s heavy lifting (i.e. those involved in the in-person design, planning and legal meetings with politicians and bureaucrats discussed here), rather than gaining a clearer picture, we run into a different set of problems. While this core group of women were fighting to increase inclusion for groups whose interests were being marginalized by the mainstream planning system (women and children in particular), their successes can also be at least somewhat attributable to the fact that this core group were far from outsiders. Most were well-off, full-time mothers with high levels of education and training in specialist areas that made dealing with the city government and organizing a movement easier (including degrees and working experience in public relations, law, marketing, IT, finance, child psychology, early childhood education, and research). They

possessed, in other words, types and amounts of social, cultural and economic capital that afforded them a degree leverage that many ‘marginal’ actors lack.

Nevertheless, the use of this leverage to open up space in formal institutions (namely public space law) for new ideas and actors is decidedly counter-hegemonic, and the way PFC leadership went about this shows the kind of imagination and resourcefulness involved in what Hilbrandt (2017) dubs ‘insurgent participation’, which entails clever ways of citizens subverting structures by participating in them. In approaching the police first, then the mayors office second, after receiving rejections for their playstreet events, we can say the PFC initially sought to follow the rules. Yet we can also say that by establishing political back channels when these rejections were received, the group effectively ‘invented’ a participatory space where they could develop a working relationship to subvert these rules – even if it meant working with a ‘competent authority’ within the government. Hilbrandt notes that ‘the notion of insurgency is concerned with the multiple expressions of conflict that participation may bring about’ (2017: 542). This can, therefore, include the use of acquiescence as a tool for creating conflict, especially when we zoom out and see a site of participation from a wider angle. Although the PFC had to make multiple concessions in their interactions with the government, they were able to successfully change planning law and engage draw individuals in positions of authority to their cause – both of which have created the opportunity for others to use play street events to challenge the established understanding of the street as a space for movement (particularly the efficient movement of people and goods for purposes of enhancing the economy). Indeed, the act of play in sites not traditionally reserved for such actions is itself a kind of insurgent, conflictive act, a challenge to the abstract rationalization of public space as an instrumental amenity that serves pre-determined purposes for an ambiguous (and unequally established) ‘all’ (Stevens, 2007). Play upends the functional-utilitarian logic of the city’s design, enabling children to establish their own explorations in, and thus definitions of, ‘public space’ (Whitzman et al. 2010).

Thus, it can be argued that what the PFC show is that, in current planning environments, to employ insurgency requires movements be transgressive – particularly, that they transgress strict definitions of ‘invited’ and ‘invented’ spaces/forms of participation, while also avoiding other kinds of binaries that totalize phenomena in terms of either/or. The PFC accomplished much of what they sought out to by *normalizing* their practices and ideals, which meant aligning them with the established system to some degree.

Ultimately, we can say that the case of the PFC cuts a double kind of insurgent line across the landscape of public space in Taipei: finding a place in the streetscape for children and mothers to enact their right to the city, and finding a place in the institutional landscape of public space control in order to ensure this right for everyone; but also acting as a decidedly non-insurgent group willing to acquiesce in collaborative processes. Rather than trying to assess whether or how the PFC is or isn't 'insurgent', therefore, our case study suggests that what defines 'insurgency' must remain as open and inclusive as the cities the insurgent planning movement strives for – reminding us that such openness is necessary to avoid forms of non-conformity paradoxically conforming to standardized patterns.

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